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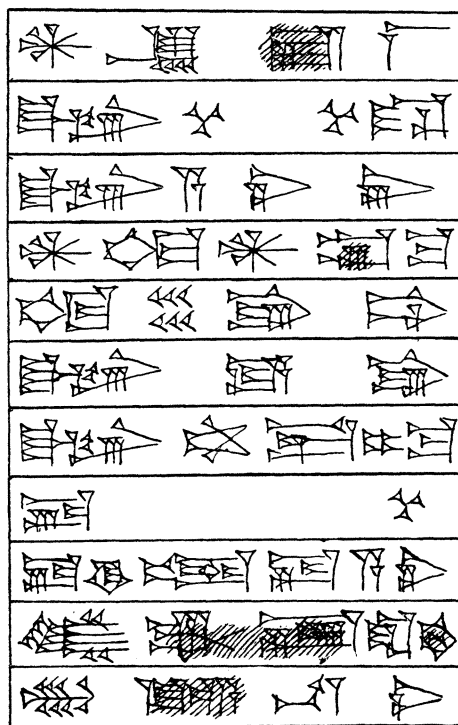
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AN EARLY BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTION FROM NIFFER.

By THEO. G. PINCHES,

British Museum, London, England.

In the mounds which mark the sites of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia, explorers generally meet with large numbers of bricks, the remains of ruined palaces and temples. Many of these bricks are, as a rule, inscribed, or stamped with an inscription recording the building or restoration of a temple or palace, usually the former. A brick from Niffer, now in the possession of Dr. R. F. Harper, shows that that city was no exception to the rule; and by his kind permission I venture to reproduce it here.



The text is one of the usual kind, stamped, by means of a wooden block, on the brick. Unfortunately, the clay does not seem to have been properly moistened

for the purpose, and the inscription, though impressed evenly, is therefore not at all distinct. The surface seems also to be covered with a thin deposit, which adds to the difficulty of deciphering the inscription. In addition to this, the block has not been cut so carefully as most of those of which impressions are to be found in the British Museum, the forms of some of the characters being unusual and probably incorrect. The illustration gives, approximately, the forms of the characters as far as the unsatisfactory state of the original allowed me to make them out.

The following is a transcription and translation of the whole :

1. (Dingir) En - lil - la	Bel
2. lugal kur - kur - ra	lord of lands
3. lugal - a - ni - ir	lord - her - to
4. (Dingir) Nin - (dingir) Dub - ba	Nin - Dubba
5. nin še - ga - bi	lady obedient
6. lugal E - ga	queen of Ega
7. lugal ub - da - tabtab - ba	queen of regions four
8. ê - kur	the house of the land
9. ê ki - ag - ga - a - ni	house beloved - his
10. šeg - al - ur - ra - kam	brick - with
11. mu - un - na - du	she - it - built.

Transcription arranged in words, and free translation :

Enlila, lugal kurkura, lugalaniir, Nin-Duba, nin šegabi, lugal Ega, lugal ub-da-tabtaba, ê-kur, ê kiagāni, šeg-al-ura-kam. munnadu.

“To* Bel, lord of the world, her lord, Nin-Duba, the obedient lady, queen of Ega, queen of the four regions, has built the house of the land, his beloved temple, with brick.”

As is well known, the ideograph for Niffer is composed of the characters en-lila ki, “Bel’s place” or “city,” and he must therefore have been the patron deity of the place. *E-ga*, in line 6, is probably another name for this city, or for a part of it. The characters for the god Bel (*Enlila* or *Ellila*) occur line 1. The word is the same as that for Niffer, but differs from it in having the divine prefix dingir and the phonetic complement la, and in the determinative suffix for a place (ki) being wanting.†

The god Bel bears the usual title of “king” or “lord of the world” lugal kurkura (= Assy. šar or bēl matāti), both renderings being possible. It

* Or “For.”

† As the inscription is written in the usual way, with expressions common to texts of this class, I do not give an analysis of the whole, but only touch upon those parts which are striking on account of their connection.

may here be noted as a point of interest, that the same character as is used for "king" or "lord" in lines 2 and 3 has to do duty for "queen" in lines 6 and 7. *Lugal* means, therefore, not only "man great," but "woman great" as well. In an Assyrian or Semitic Babylonian text *šarrat*, "queen of," would have been used.* The title "king" (or "queen") "of the four regions" (*lugal ubda tabtaba* = Assy. *šar kiprat arba'i*) was borne by most of the ancient kings of the Tigris and Euphrates valley.

The last line but one gives an expression which is not usually found in inscriptions of this class, the statement as to the material of which the temple was built. The group *šeg-al-ura* (= Assy. *agurru*), meaning "brick," is very common in architectural descriptions. The pronunciation given here may be regarded as certain, though there is a possibility that the first character *šeg* was simply an unpronounced determinative prefix. The variant *šeg-al-mur-ra* (*šeg-al-wur-ra* = *šeg-al-ura*) also occurs (see Brünnow's "Classified List," p. 453).†

The date of this inscription (which, I believe, is the only text of a queen of Mesopotamia known) is uncertain. Judging from the style of the characters, it should be about 1500 B. C., but it may be as early as 2500 B. C. In one of the royal lists there is the name of a much earlier queen, *Azaga-Bau*, or *Bau-êliti* ("Bau is glorious"), who probably reigned between 3500 and 3000 B. C. From this it may be judged that female rulers in Mesopotamia were exceedingly few and far between.

These inscribed bricks, with the many royal inscriptions on stone, composed in the same idiom, are most important for the Sumero-Akkadian question. No reasonable man can believe for a moment that an exceedingly extensive line of kings, in a country where the remembrance of one's name and one's glorious deeds was regarded as the thing most to be desired upon earth, should choose to write their inscriptions and records in an idiom which was no language at all, but a cryptography, or a sacred writing, known only to the few. These texts were undoubtedly written for the many, and not for the information of the priests, who, being more or less acquainted with the history of the royal families, had less need to know what was written on the bricks, etc., than the rest of the population.

* The feminine determinative prefix,  (late Babylonian and Assyrian ) does not occur in this text except in the compound character  *lady* (lines 4 and 5), of which it forms a part,  being written for , late Babylonian  Assyrian . The group means literally "female lord."

† The readings of a few characters in Dr. Harper's text are doubtful. The principal are *šeg* a, in line 5, and *ubda* in line 7.

‡ WAI., V., pl. 44, l. 19ab.

Even if the anti-Akkadists could conclusively prove that the idiom which we call Akkadian was in any sense a world-speech (to restore "Volapük" to its original form), they must also explain satisfactorily the existence of a dialect (Sumerian), and how a Semitic people could invent an idiom differing so strangely from that of their own language (see the text here transcribed and translated). What I contended in my paper upon the "Languages of the Early Inhabitants of Mesopotamia"* (to which many more arguments could now be added) still remains unanswered.

* Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, vol. xvi., part ii., April, 1884.